



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
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October 9, 2002

TO: Washington State Board of Health Members

FROM: Craig McLaughlin, Senior Health Policy Manager

RE: FOLLOW-UP ON COMMUNICATING WITH THE LEGISLATURE

Background and Summary

In January 2001, the Board adopted SBOH Policy 2001-001 (attached). The policy established a procedure for monitoring legislative matters. It provided two processes for communication between Board members and the Legislature. When a bill conflicts with the Board's authority, according to the policy, staff should draft a letter for the Board chair. When a bill that contains policy or programmatic changes counter to Board intent or direction or within a priority work area, staff should bring the matter to the attention of the Chair and the Board sponsor to determine a response. Board members could speak or write to the Legislature, provided that they made it clear they were not representing the entire Board. Only the chair could speak on behalf of the Board without prior consultation and direction, and only when the position communicated seemed to reflect the wishes of the majority of the Board.

At the Board's March 13 meeting, I provided a report on efforts to track bills and communicate the Board members' positions to the 2002 Legislature. In summary, staff tracked more than 20 bills and reviewed a score more. Board members sent letters commenting on 18 bills. Staff testified on seven bills, discussed others with legislative staffers, and met with lawmakers.

During the Board discussion that followed the report, a member said it put him in an undesirable position when asked to express his opinion as a Board member hours before a hearing when there was no opportunity to consult with the chair or other Board members. Chair Lake recommended that before the 2003 session begins, Board members and staff discuss the appropriate role of Board members during session, and consider whether there might be ways to improve the process. We have scheduled time on today's agenda for a discussion of time management and communication of policy during a rapidly moving legislative process.

Recommended Board Action:

The Board may choose to provide direction to staff or to revise SBOH Policy 2001-001.

Attachment